12/12/13 Debrief with Doug Kaufman

**Grade 5 Demonstration Lesson Debrief**

***Q: How do you connect readers workshop to writers workshop?***

A: Doug always asks his students to “read like writers.” When he was teaching 6th grade he asked for a block for readers and writers workshop and within two weeks it had morphed into literacy workshop. He sees reading and writing as symbiotic; they support each other. During writers workshop you’re going to focus on writers’ craft and during readers workshop you’re going to be focusing on text features but they really blend together well and can be done as a whole literacy block. Doug said that he knows it’s difficult when you have been used to teaching reading and writing as separate subjects but he feels that it is value added to put them together into a literacy workshop.

Doug thinks that KWL (What I Know, What I Want to Learn, What I Have Learned) or KWHL (How Will I Learn It?) is a classic teaching and learning strategy that can be used with any topic. If he had to throw away everything else, he would keep KWHL.

Doug said that he loves the Hemingway quote: “How did I learn to write? I read.

How did I learn to read? I wrote.” This exemplifies the literacy workshop.

***Q: Where do I start with struggling writers?***

A: The workshop model provides a huge advantage for working with struggling writers. Train yourself to have a notebook or a pad on a clipboard to jot down notes as you wander the room, monitoring and conferencing with your students. Make sure you date each of these anecdotal notes. Doug used to literally cut these notes apart and then file them in chronological order in each of his students’ individual files. Doug would take home about 3 kids’ files every night after school and use them as a formative assessment in planning specific instruction. Then he could target what skills and strategies those children needed and he could plan a guided reading or a guided writing lesson aimed at meeting those specific children’s needs.

Doug said that if research tells us anything it’s that we can’t take a kid from way below grade level to on grade level in a very short time; there’s no panacea. But if we can create a trajectory for them and work with them one-on-one or in small groups based on what we know as their teacher, we can move them in the right direction.

One of the key features of workshop is its flexibility. You can do a mini lesson with only half the class while the other half of the class is working on their reading and/or writing. You can have one-on-one, small group, half class, whole class explicit instruction. You need to look at where your kids are and then structure your class to meet their needs for each day. It takes time to get comfortable with that.

***Q: What’s the difference between guided reading and small group conferencing?***

A: Guided reading is more structured than small group conferencing. In guided reading, the teacher has identified a need that a small group of students has. At the beginning, it’s more teacher-directed. A small group conference is more student-directed. The students are asking for help. You’re talking as writer to writer or reader to reader. You’re offering information and explanations and advice. A conference is often more impromptu and conversational. In guided reading, you’ve already identified what the need is and you’ve structured a lesson to support that specific group of students.

***Q: What does conferencing look like?***

A: Conferencing looks like what Doug did during the demonstration lesson this morning. He said, “My knees are always dirty,” because he gets on the floor with the kids. Doug said that we have to train the students to ask for help. You have to train them to identify what they need and what their specific problem is.

Doug suggested having a colleague come in and do a model conference in front of the kids. In the debrief, serve as a facilitator to chart what helped the writer during the conference, what are the elements of a good conference. Then have the kids practice what makes a good conference. These elements include:

* Have a purpose
* Writer asks for help
* Be good listeners
* Listen specifically for what the writer has asked
* Give feedback about what questions the writer has

Doug teaches mini lessons on learning how to learn, learning how to talk, etc. Those mini lessons are just as important or more important as the content mini lessons. It makes it really fun when it’s going well.

Doug said that we can trust students and just give them free rein and it can turn out to be a disaster. Or we can teach them how to be independent learners. It’s unfair to them to just release responsibility for learning to them without teaching them how to accept this responsibility. We don’t abdicate our responsibility as teachers in the workshop model. You need to train students how to do a good turn and talk. It takes 6 weeks to 2 months to teach these strategies and skills without abandoning reading and writing instruction.

**Grade 3 Debrief**

Doug said that we need to fundamentally alter the students’ conceptions about what writing is. Revision is writing. Revision is playing with our writing. You may need to slow down the curriculum and not expect to have a piece done in three days. This is what the CCSS is all about.

***Q: How do I have students writing in a genre that I’m not teaching and know that they’re doing it appropriately?***

A: We know that students need to be well versed in three different genres in preparation for the SBAC high stakes assessment. If students are writing on a regular basis, they will become well versed in all genres. Doug always started the year with a unit on free choice. If we want students to be independent and choose their own topic and genre, we need to explicitly teach them the following:

* How do wrtiers find their own topics?
* How do writers choose their genre?
* Where do writers get their ideas?

Doug has found lots of author’s Web sites that have useful information for teaching this. He strongly encouraged teachers to share your own writing with your students. They will resonate with it. Share your writing process.

Once kids establish identities as writers, then you can teach them about writing in a specific genre during an ELA unit. Tell them that there is something that is very helpful in having everyone write in the same genre so we can have a conversation together. Doug doesn’t want teachers to get locked into a scope and sequence of an ELA Curriculum. Teachers know their own kids and they need to make professional decisions about which lessons need to take how much time and not be driven by the curriculum. The curriculum gives us a shape but children’s needs and interests drive our teaching practice.

Take really good notes about what is going on with each student. Date everything so you have your notes in chronological order. Doug used to take 3 folders home a night to do continuous formative assessment.

The real key is that the kids are writing every day and know that they are writers. The genre study can be remarkably short. If they study the genre without having the opportunity to write, it’s decontextualizing the learning. Good writing is good writing is good writing, regardless of the genre.

Doug talked about how J.K. Rowling mapped out all 7 of her books as she was writing the first one.

As students become comfortable as writers of multiple genres, you can compare one genre to another to see the similarities and difference.

Doug said that the format for a literacy lesson is “absurdly simple”:

* Find the objective for the day
* Find an example, i.e., a mentor text – anything that you can find whether it has words or not can serve as a mentor text, e.g., your own writing, student writing, a book, an article, a picture, etc.
* Talk about it
* Apply it
* Share

Virtually every mini lesson that Doug does looks like this. The sophistication of the lessons is much less but the kids work becomes more sophisticated. A good mini lesson is very simple and focuses on one thing at a time. Doug finds that he often comes into schools and serves as a confirmer and reinforcer of good practices.

**Q: What are good books to use as mentor texts?**

A: Joe Stefon has just forwarded a list that Doug sent him. However, Doug encouraged the teachers to create their own mentor text lists. Jane volunteered to create a Google spreadsheet and share it with All Stanton Teachers. It will follow the format below:

**Mentor Texts**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Title of Book | What is this book a good mentor text for? | Who has a copy at Stanton? | Grade Level/ Reading Level | Is it better for Reading (R)or Writing (W) or Both (B)? Type R, W, or B below: |
|  |  |  |  |  |

Doug talked about doing reflective use of the CCSS. Reflect on what you’ve taught on a weekly basis and look at the standards that you’ve addressed.

He encouraged teachers not to get confused about trying to keep readers and writers workshop separate. Doug explained that he asked for a block for readers workshop and a block for writers workshop when he was teaching 6th grade. Within two weeks, it became a literacy block because reading and writing are so intertwined. Doug encouraged the teachers to think about being flexible as they implement the Literacy Workshop Model in their classrooms. He told them, “Do what you’re doing; keep pushing forward.”

He reminded the teachers that this is “Evolution, not revolution.” Try a little piece and see how it works. Then try something else.

**Doug’s Open Invitation**

Doug made an open invitation to the students and all of the Stanton teachers. If the students want to share their writing and get feedback from Doug or the teachers have questions about implementing the Literacy Workshop Model, they can email Doug at [doug.kaufman@uconn.edu](mailto:doug.kaufman@uconn.edu). He’d be happy to read student writing and talk with any of our teachers and answer their questions.